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PHILOSOPHY
OF THE
SINGLE TAX ON LAND VALUES
EXAMINED.

**THE SINGLE TAX THEORY IS A
DANGEROUS FALLACY.**

The advocates of the SINGLE TAX THEORY are again before the Legislature. Their doctrine is a delusion and a snare; and any measure that is advocated by them should be carefully scrutinized, lest it turn out to be the entering wedge for more violent and dangerous changes. If you wish to know just what the advocates of Single Tax are working ultimately to achieve, and what their theory really means, read the inclosed address by Dr. Shutter. Extra copies may be obtained free of charge by applying to Rome G. Brown, 1004 Guaranty Loan Building, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SINGLE TAX EXAMINED.

BY MARION D. SHUTTER.

I.—WHAT IS THE SINGLE TAX? WHAT DOES IT PROPOSE?

(1) The Single Tax is not a tax upon land itself, but upon *land values*.

The only land, therefore, which enters into the question is valuable land,—that which brings, or which might bring, its owner a return in the shape of rent; land whose holding thus gives him some real or imaginary advantage over the rest of the community; land which possibly lies idle, waiting for some profitable outcome in the future.

(2) The Single Tax is not a tax upon the improvements on land. It is a tax upon the value of land, *irrespective of these improvements*.

The buildings, fences, drains, wells,—orchards, too, I suppose,—must not be counted in when we try to determine the value of a farm; the business block, factory, or dwelling, must not enter when we try to ascertain the value of a lot in the city. These are the productions of human labor, and the Single Tax does not propose to levy for the support of government upon anything that is produced by human labor.

(3) The Single Tax is “single” in that the burden of contributing to the expenses of government is to be lifted from everything else, *and placed upon land values alone*.

All public revenues, whether municipal, county, state, or national, are to be raised exclusively by this method. Incomes, personal property, franchises, stocks, are to be exempted. No money is to be raised by licenses or fines. The inter-

nal revenue tax upon whisky and tobacco is to be abolished. Custom houses are to be swept away and foreign importations of all kinds admitted free of duty. That is to say that whatever proportion of the public funds is now raised by levying upon a multitude of objects besides land values is to be added to the proportion already borne by such values, making them the sole source of revenue for all purposes whatsoever. Land that has value attaching to it, therefore, becomes the Atlas that, single-handed, bears up the weight of the world !

It is easily apparent from this that one of the objects aimed at by the advocates of the Single Tax is *absolute Free Trade*.

This they cheerfully admit. They are now engaged in circulating by thousands Mr. George's book against protection, in order to prepare the public mind for the defeat of protection in 1892. I am not here to argue the question of protection or free trade to-night ; but if there are any persons here from the outside, I want them to clearly understand what is meant by abolishing all other forms of taxation, and collecting the expenses of government entirely from the rental value of land. There may be those inclined to think favorably of giving the Single Tax a trial who have not duly considered its avowed and inevitable outcome,—who are not quite ready to admit that we ought to tear down our custom-houses and throw our ports wide open.

I have described the Single Tax as fairly as it could be done in brief space ; and what I propose to do to-night is to

EXAMINE ITS FOUNDATIONS.

I shall try to discover and analyze its underlying principles. It is true the single tax may be separately considered as a scheme of taxation ; or it might be discussed as a means of abolishing poverty. I shall confine myself to the subject I have announced. If the basilar principle is not substantial, the structure will be of no avail. A building is never stronger than the stones upon which it rests—or, indeed, the weakest of these. If there be a flaw in one of the underlying rocks, the walls are doomed.

II.—FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF THE SINGLE TAX.

When this change in our system of taxation is proposed, the question very naturally arises, "Why should the rental value of land be singled out and made to bear the entire weight of taxation?"

The answer is that land belongs to the entire community, and it is only by appropriating the proceeds of land in taxation that the community receives any benefit from that which is its own, but which has been alienated by private individuals.

The philosophical basis of the Single Tax, therefore, is the

DENIAL OF THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE PROPERTY IN LAND.

Let us be sure that we are not mistaken.

"We have traced," says Mr. George, "the unequal distribution of wealth, which is the curse and menace of modern civilization, to the institution of private property in land. * * There is but one way to remove an evil, and that is to remove its cause. * * To extirpate poverty, to make wages what justice commands they should be, the full earnings of the laborer, we must therefore substitute for the individual ownership of land, a common ownership. * * We must make land common property."—*Progress and Poverty*, p. 295.

(1) This is what he proposes. The Single Tax, therefore, is not only a step towards absolute free trade, but it is just as surely a step towards the *abolition of individual titles in land*.

This, of course, is no news to the league. But I want those who are not upon the inside, who are merely looking upon the scheme as a simple change in methods of taxation, to understand whither it all tends. I do not want them to take a leap in the dark. If they have titles to lands, and are ready to vacate them when the time comes, very good! If they are ready to admit what Mr. George charges, that the system under which they hold their deeds, is responsible for all the social ills of this country, and that the only way to cure those ills is to allow the land to revert to the community, then they are perfectly consistent in favoring the Single Tax. I have nothing to say to them. I simply desire to warn those who do not know, to what precipice they are being lured.

“Our fundamental mistake,” says Mr. George, “is treating land as private property. On this false basis modern civilization everywhere rests.”—*Social Problems*, pp. 209.

(2) How is the change from the false basis to what Mr. George considers the true to be accomplished?

John Stuart Mill would have advised the State to buy out the owners. Mr. George thinks such compensation would be nonsense. The State is already rightful owner of the soil. Those who now hold it are thieves and robbers. They have grasped for themselves what belongs to all. They must in some way be made to disgorge. The Single Tax will be the means of “confiscation.”

That I may not seem to do Mr. George injustice, in stating his views of land-owners, let him speak for himself.

In his “Protection or Free Trade,” page 284, the robbers assailing and plundering labor are described as follows:

“In itself the abolition of protection is like the driving off of a robber. But it will not help a man to drive off one robber, if another still stronger and more rapacious be left to plunder him. Labor may be likened to a man who, as he carries home his earnings, is waylaid by a series of robbers. One demands this much, and another that much, but last of all stands one who demands all that is left, save just enough to enable the victim to maintain his life and come forth next day to work. So long as this last robber remains, what will it benefit such a man to drive off any or all of the other robbers?

“Such is the situation of labor to-day throughout the civilized world. And the robber that takes all that is left is private property in land.”

In his reply to the Duke of Argyll, page 67, he says:

“They consume most, waste most, carry off most, while they produce least. As landlords, in fact, they produce nothing. They merely consume and destroy. Economically considered, they have the same effect upon production as bands of robbers or pirate fleets. To national wealth they are as weavils in the grain, as rats in the store-house, as ferrets in the poultry yard.”

Once more :

“The wide-spreading social evils which everywhere oppress men amid an advancing civilization, spring from a great primary

wrong—the appropriation, as the exclusive property of some men, of the land on which and from which all must live. From this fundamental injustice flow all the injustices which distort and endanger modern development, which condemn the producer of wealth to poverty and pamper the non-producer in luxury, which rear the tenement house with the palace, plant the brothel behind the church, and compel us to build prisons as we open new schools.”—*Progress and Poverty*., page 305.

These extracts show us sufficiently how Mr. George regards the system and those who hold land under it. While he does not, as he explains in another place, mean to impugn the private character of any one, yet as a matter of fact, every land-owner is a robber.

This charge, if true at all, must apply not only to those who own large tracts, but to all. It is the same system under which the holder of his house-lot and the lord of millions of acres have obtained their possessions. You need not, therefore, be guilty of owning a ranche or a bonanza farm ; but if you are a workingman who own the lot upon which your house stands, you are helping to condemn “the producer of wealth to poverty, and pamper the non-producer in luxury.” If you have invested your surplus earnings in a town lot instead of putting them into a savings bank, “you are helping to rear the tenement-house with the palace, and plant the brothel behind the church.” The settler who has accepted a homestead from the government is “compelling us to build prisons as we open new schools.” “To such base uses, may we return, Horatio !”

Every one who holds a title to land is a robber !

That land belongs to the community. True, he may have bought and paid for it, and may hold his title from the State ; but Mr. George tells us that “there is on earth no power that can rightfully make a grant of exclusive ownership in land.”

(3) It is true that Mr. George does not himself advocate violence in the resumption of society’s stolen claims, but his writings contain passages that are calculated to precipitate the very violence he deprecates.

He certainly holds that it would be right for the people to

vacate all titles to land, even by revolution. If he does not, what is the meaning of these passages?

“Why should they who suffer from this injustice hesitate for one moment to sweep it away? Who are the land holders that they should thus be permitted to reap where they have not sown? * * *And when a title rests but on force, no complaint can be made when force annuls it.* Whenever the people, having the power, choose to annul those titles, no objection can be made in the name of justice.”—*Progress and Poverty*, pp. 306, 7.

“It is not merely a robbery in the past; it is a robbery in the present—a robbery that deprives of their birthright the infants that are now coming into the world! Why should we hesitate about making short work of such a system? Because I was robbed yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that, is it any reason that I should suffer myself to be robbed to-day and to-morrow? Any reason that I should conclude that the robber has acquired a vested right to rob me?”—*Ib.* 328.

I ask again, what does he mean, if he does not mean that it would be perfectly right for the community to dispossess the owners of land even by violence? That is about all the authority that many in the community would want, to justify them in rising up against those whom they have been taught to consider the pirates and robbers of society—the owners of land. Mr. George is not an anarchist, but the logic of Mr. George leads to the conclusion of the anarchist. The Chicago hay-market is the last link in the chain.

(4) But Mr. George, while holding that it would be right to “confiscate”—I use his own word—the land of the individual, and that the individual thus denuded of his estate, would have no ground to complain, yet does not propose to confiscate land. He says it is needless. There is a more excellent way. He will take by subtlety what he would shrink from taking by force.

“I do not propose either to purchase or to confiscate private property in land. The first would be unjust; the second, needless. Let the individuals who now hold it still retain, if they want to, possession of what they are pleased to call *their* land. Let them continue to call it *their* land. Let them buy and sell, and bequeath and devise it. We may safely leave them the shell,

if we take the kernel. *It is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent.* * * We already take some rent in taxation. We have only to make some changes in our modes of taxation to take it all. * *

“*In this way the State may become the universal landlord without calling herself so, and without assuming a single new function. In form, the ownership of land would remain just as now. No owner of land need be dispossessed, and no restriction need be placed upon the amount of land any one could hold. For, rent being taken by the State in taxes, land, no matter in whose name it stood, or in what parcels it was held, would be really common property, and every member of the community would participate in the advantages of its ownership.*”—*Progress and Poverty*, pp. 364, 5.

In other words, the change from private to virtual public ownership, is to be effected BY MEANS OF THE SINGLE TAX. Let us not lose sight of this fact. The grand function of the Single Tax, whatever else its advocates may expect from its adoption, is *to practically abolish private ownership in land* and throw the management of the soil into the hands of the State.

Once more, Mr. George:—

“Now inasmuch as the taxation of rent, or land values, must necessarily be increased just as we abolish other taxes, we may put the proposition into practical form by proposing—

To abolish all taxation save that upon land values.”—*Ib.* 365.

This is the Single Tax. This brings us back to the point from which we started: The Single Tax rests upon the denial of the right of private property in land.

III.—THE ARGUMENT AGAINST PRIVATE OWNERSHIP.

The Single Tax is the method by which the change in landlords is to be made; but why make the change? What are the reasons? Why may not land be property in the same sense that a house is property?

1. It is condemned on the ground of NATURAL RIGHTS.

Let us again be sure we are correct.

“To affirm the rightfulness of property in land, is to affirm a claim which has no warrant in nature, as against a claim

founded in the organization of man and the laws of the material universe.”—*Progress and Poverty*, p. 302.

“Whatever may be said for the institution of private property in land, it is therefore plain that it cannot be defended on the score of justice.

“The equal right of all men to the use of land is as clear as their equal right to breathe the air—it is a right proclaimed by the fact of their existence. For we cannot suppose that some men have a right to be in this world and others no right.”—*Ib.* p. 303.

“Vice and misery, poverty and pauperism, are not the legitimate results of increase of population and industrial development; they only follow increase of population and industrial development because land is treated as private property—they are the direct and necessary results of the violation of the supreme law of justice, involved in giving to some men the exclusive possession of that which nature provides for all men.

“The recognition of individual proprietorship of land is the denial of the natural rights of other individuals—it is a wrong which *must* show itself in the inequitable division of wealth.” *Ib.* p. 306.

(1) What are natural rights and how are they to be determined?

The advocates of the Single Tax are fond of quoting in reply the Declaration of Independence, “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” They add that the use of land is essential to these and hence must be also a natural right.

They might go farther and say that man has also a right to food, clothing and shelter, for without these life cannot be maintained. If the pursuit of happiness be a natural right, he has also a natural right to those things which he believes will promote his happiness,—horses and carriages, pianos and opera tickets. Why not? If land is essential to life and liberty, these may be essential to happiness. The socialists say he has such right. They are perfectly consistent. If the Single Tax advocates push their logic a little further, *they will find themselves landing in socialism*. We are informed, upon the authority of Mr. Rae, that in England many who began with the

denial of the right of private property in land, have ended by becoming out and out socialists.

This is another of the inevitable tendencies of the Single Tax.

But how are one's natural rights to be determined? If I am born with a right to the soil, is it to any particular spot of that soil? No; for this would be to absorb the use of it selfishly to myself,—this would be private property, which above all things is to be abhorred with a righteous and benevolent abhorrence. I am simply born with a right to the soil in general. My natural right is a very indistinct and vapory one. Just as soon as I try to give it a “local habitation and a name,” it becomes a personal and private right to a particular thing, a particular place, and the sword of the Single Tax is lifted against it. It is like turning a herd of cattle into a pasture, and saying, “You all have natural rights to this grass, but no one of you must eat any particular mouthful, for in so doing, you would trespass upon the natural rights of all the rest.”

The difficulty of all this is felt so keenly that the advocates of the Single Tax are wont to put in a qualifying phrase, “it is a right which rests in every human being as he enters the world, and which during his continuance in the world, *can be limited only by the equal rights of others.*”

That qualifying phrase so modifies the natural rights of man that they become metamorphosed into civil rights.

Those limitations must be decided by civil society, by the state, which holds the right of eminent domain in land and in all other things. The state may decide, for certain reasons, that all a man's property may be forfeited. It may decide that he no longer has right even to life,—to say nothing of liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The state may decide that a man's natural right to the soil is best defined and limited, and *secures least interference with the rights of others* by awarding him private ownership in some particular piece of land. The question whether a man has a right in this or that direction, a right to this thing or that, is a question whether it is best for society as a whole that he should exercise this right. An alleged nat-

ural right is easily shown to be no right at all if it appears that the exercise of it would infringe the general good !

(2) But let us follow this doctrine of natural rights a little farther.

If an individual has no right to appropriate a lot, what right has a nation to appropriate a territory ?

By what right does any particular nation occupy any particular spot upon this planet? If a man has not a right to say, This plot of ground is mine as against all comers,—by what authority does any body of people say, This domain is mine as against all other bodies of people in the world?

Mr. George, in his *Social Problems*, has a chapter with the odorous title, “Dumping Garbage.” It is on the subject of Irish immigration. He deplores such immigration. But by what process can he deny to what he calls “this Irish human garbage” (p. 127) the right to a place for dumping? Have they not all equal and inalienable rights to the soil with all the rest of us? If they were denied that right upon the Emerald isle, shall we pursue the same selfish policy that drove them forth? I believe that laboring men in general, and those who claim to represent their interests, are in favor of excluding the Chinese and other cheap laborers from abroad. So am I in favor of it—at least for the next quarter of a century. But how can we do it upon this theory? The Chinaman may say: “I was born with a natural right to the soil in general; by what authority do you confine me within the walls of the celestial empire?” And you cannot answer till you step from the platform of natural to the platform of civil rights.

(3) One or two questions more:—

If the state has no right to grant private titles in land, what right has the state to collect the rental of lands? The right to receive involves the right to give.

Another question: If every man has a natural and inalienable right to the soil, why tax him for the use of that to which he has a natural and inalienable right?

The whole matter reduces to a question of policy and expediency. The state must do what it deems best upon the

whole for all its citizens. All our fine talk vanishes. The doctrine of natural rights is one of the vaguest doctrines that ever flapped its shadowy wings in the atmosphere of human thought !

2. Closely allied to the argument of natural rights is another that, indeed, is but the obverse side. Land is a

BOON OF NATURE ;

land, with all its resources, is the gift of God to all His children. No man, or set of men, may take for private use, the universal dowry.

“ God made the land,” says Mr. George ; “ it is his bounty to the human race. Where does any man or set of men get the right to parcel out and sell this heritage of our Heavenly Father to all his children alike ? ”

We may quite fully agree with Mr. George in his devout acknowledgement of God as the Creator of the world ; but it is a premise from which his conclusion, by no means, follows. It does not transpire that because God made the land none of his children have a right to any particular part of it. Indeed, the very opposite of all this would seem to be the presumption. It would coincide more nearly with what we can conjecture of his plans that this land should be held in severalty and not in common. If his purpose is at all revealed by the course of history, the race has progressed from the gregarious to the individual holding.

(1) But *land is not the only thing that is the gift of God.* The cattle on a thousand hills, the sheep that pasture in the valleys, the horses that draw the plow or the carriage,—these are the gifts of God as much as the land. They have not been produced by human labor. Upon what grounds may the farmer own an ox, the shepherd a sheep, the drayman the horse that draws his wagon ? The gold in the mines, the iron in the hills, the coal deposits in the fields, the forests,—these are all the gifts of God. Indeed, we might extend the proposition and say that everything in this world is the gift of God.

Mr. George includes “ natural resources ” in his definition of land, and thus drives his argument farther and farther in the

direction of socialism pure and simple. What right has any one to take for himself an article made from these resources,—from any of nature's raw material?

What right, for example, has Mr. George to the pen which he used as an illustration?

“The pen with which I am writing,” he says, “is justly mine. No other human being can rightfully lay claim to it, for in me is the title of the original producers who made it.”

Mr. George has very much to say about the manner in which land was originally appropriated, about the robbers who laid violent hands upon it; he dashes them hither and thither upon the waves of his impassioned rhetoric. Surely he will not tolerate robbery anywhere. We feel that all the gifts of God are secure; for Mr. George stands in the attitude of a policeman at the door of Nature's treasure-house to see that no private thief breaks through to steal. Nature's treasures under this guardianship are secure as if they were laid up in heaven!

But now a question. How did the original producers of Mr. George's pen obtain the raw materials, the gifts of God, out of which they made the pen to which they gave him the title? Was it not by appropriating to themselves a part “of God's bounty to the human race?” How did the original producers of the chair in which Mr. George was sitting when he wrote, obtain the raw materials, the wood, out of which they made it? Was it not by parcelling out to themselves a portion of “the heritage of our Heavenly Father to all his children?” If Mr. George owns a house, who authorized the original producers to take clay from this “common heritage?” His argument proves so much that it proves nothing to his purpose. *The socialist is the only one who can consistently use it.* The Single Tax man who employs it is galloping along the road to that self-same goal!

(2) If we are told that a man can only have property in that which he has produced by his own labor, then I affirm that there is a very important sense in which man is the creator of the land.

Some of the richest land in England lies in what is called the

“fen country.” It was not many generations ago covered by the sea. That land is to-day as much the product of skill and labor, as was the palace of the Cæsars or the modern railroad.

The Duke of Argyll says that in Scotland, since the close of the civil wars in 1745, thousands of acres have been reclaimed from bog and waste.

“Some of the best land in Belgium,” says Mr. Rae, “was barren sand-heaps a hundred years ago, and has been made what it is only by the continuous and untiring efforts of small proprietors. In these cases the labor and the results of the labor are obvious, but no cultivated land exists anywhere that is not the product of much labor.”

The case of Holland is so marked that it has given rise to the proverb, “God made the world, but the Dutch made Holland.”

It is the application of capital and labor everywhere that has turned the wilderness into a fruitful field and made the desert blossom as the rose.

The truth of the matter is Nature has no boon to give. Everything that we obtain from Nature is the result of toil and struggle. Nature has nothing for man but what he obtains by the sweat of his brow. This boon was given to man by the same sense, and in no other, in which it was given to the wild beasts. They had, indeed, the priority of possession. Man displaced them; but it has been truly said, that “the nearer we get back to the pure boon, the more we find man like other animals in his mode of existence, his grade of comfort, his standard of happiness, his subjection to Nature.” * * “Whatever we have, therefore, that is worth having is not a boon of Nature, but a conquest of civilization from Nature.”

Nor is this true alone of land in general; it is true, in large measure, of the land in towns and cities. In the center of the city of Lynn, once stood a rough, wild, stony, almost inaccessible tract of land, known as High Rock. In an earlier day it was only noted as the cottage of Moll Pitcher, the witch and fortune teller, stood at its base. At length this high and barren tract of land was purchased by James N. Buffum, the eminent Quaker philanthropist. He smoothed the ragged and jagged

surface, and covered it with cheerful soil. He made avenues of approach, and laid out beautiful streets, and shortly appeared in the market green house-lots in that transformed locality.

It is related of this same Mr. Buffum that towards the close of his life, a man of very dismal religion went to him and said, "Friend Buffum, suppose after all your work you should at last be sent to hell, what would you do?" "Just what I have done in Lynn; go to work to improve the place."

In our own city, how have vast areas been made fit to receive human habitations and places of business? By money and skill and toil in leveling hills and filling up swamps. If these tracts had been left in their original state, as the "boon of nature" or the "gift of God," how much less would they be worth than they are to-day! Man has in large measure created them.

(3) We are told that we must distinguish between the bare land and the improvements. *But where the improvements have gone into the land itself* and constitute a part of its value, how are we to so make the distinction that we *can tax the land as nature left it* and *exempt the land as man has made it*? How shall we separate the primitive grant from the human contribution? This must be done, if we are to carry out the single tax program.

But this problem does not trouble Mr. George. He jauntily cuts the Gordian knot.

Listen to his words: "But it will be said, There are improvements which in time become indistinguishable from the land itself. Very well; then the title to the improvements becomes blended with the title to the land; the individual right is lost in the common right. It is the greater that swallows up the less, not the less that swallows up the greater. Nature does not proceed from man, but man from nature, and it is to the bosom of nature that he and all his works must return again."

This is the way in which the novelist so often disposes of a troublesome character, or relieves the awkwardness of an unfortunate situation—by death. There are more senses than one

in which the phrase of Burns may be used, "O death, the poor man's dearest friend!" In this trying predicament, it is certainly the best friend of Mr. George. We need not give ourselves any uneasiness about these improvements; the earth swallows up everything; and we are not going to live long ourselves!

When Hamlet returns from the ghost, his friends anxiously inquire:

Horatio—What news, my lord?

Hamlet—O wonderful!

Hor.—Good my lord, tell it.

Ham.—Would heart of man once think it?

There's never a villian living in all Denmark,

But he's an arrant knave!

Hor.—There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave to tell us this!

When we ask Mr. George how we are to distinguish between the land as nature gave it and the improvements man has made, and he tells us in answer, "We must all die!" we may paraphrase Horatio, and say, It needs no Single Tax philosopher, my lord, come all the way from San Francisco, to tell us this!

The appeal to nature's boon cannot settle this question of the right to own land. It is a question of policy and expediency that must be adjusted on the ground of human experience; on the basis of what society finds best.

3. The right of private property in land is denied upon a third count, that of the

UNEARNED INCREMENT.

It is claimed that the value of land depends upon population, and that the increase in land values due to this cause, properly belongs to the community. Every person in the community, by the very fact of his presence, adds to the value of the land upon which the town or city stands and all the land in the vicinity, and is entitled to his share of the values thus created or enhanced. The only way in which he can receive the benefit is for the community to appropriate that value in taxation, and devote it to the common good, by paying with it the expenses of government.

(1) Let us examine this assertion that all land values are created by the community. The trouble with the advocates of this theory is that their assertions are all too sweeping, and while there is a grain of truth in many of those assertions, it is only to be found after threshing through the bushel of chaff that contains it.

It is not true to say that ALL LAND VALUES are due to the presence of a population. Land is sometimes valuable for the deposits of ore it contains, or for the forests that grow upon it. It may be hundreds of miles from human habitation. Just as soon as some enterprising or adventurous spirit discovers its resources, he knows that it is worth more than he can compute, and like the man in the parable who found the treasure in the field, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Other land as we have already seen, is very largely the creation of man. It is not due to the vicinity of a great population ; but to the expenditure of time and energy and capital.

The value of still other land is due to the skill with which it is cultivated. It is due to the brains and labor of one man and not to the presence of ten thousand. Two tracts of equal fertility to begin with, will have a selling value in the course of a few years widely different according to the ability and industry of the two men who own them. They may stand near the same city, but their value depends not upon fifty thousand men, but upon two men !

These deductions must be made from the assertion that land values depend upon the community. And upon the other hand, even where the assertion holds good, we must not get the idea that ALL MEMBERS of the community *help* to give land its value.

Take one hundred men out of this community to-day, and leave their places vacant. Let them take their capital and remove the industries they operate to another place and then figure up your land values. Take out the men who own the mills and factories and railroads, and then compute your unearned increment. The fact is that the enterprise and sagacity and business ability of a few men make a community grow before they realize anything from the growth they have created. They

have made the community, and the community is first of all indebted to them. Take them away, and what proportion of our 165,000 inhabitants would be left at the end of a year?

There are others who contribute, and who contribute much, to the upbuilding of the community in the work of their hands. Others who do nothing. Still others who do worse than nothing. There are elements in every city that are a menace and not a benefit. Paupers, and those who are wilfully idle and vicious, depress the value of everything, and enhance the value of nothing. It is not, therefore, accurate to say that land values are created by the WHOLE community—that all have an equal right, or any right whatever to the unearned increment.

(2) But what is *the unearned increment itself*?

It is simply the result of a successful investment. It has been attended with its risks as any other investment would be. One man puts his money into stocks, another into land. What is the difference? Why not confiscate the dividends by taxation? Why take the rise in land values alone?

Is it not true that other forms of investment are dependent upon the growth of community? A railroad charter, a street car or electric light franchise, these have only such value as investments, as the community gives them. But is it not true that any business may grow from the same causes? The business of a merchant, of a newspaper, of a hotel, of a professional man even,—may increase with the multiplication of population; why should not their earnings go into the public treasury with the returns from the land-holder's investment?

The Single Tax would not fall upon personal property. Suppose twenty years ago, I invested a few hundred dollars in a painting. The artist rises to prominence and dies. His pictures are eagerly sought. I find myself at length in possession of a work of art worth \$10,000. What have I done to increase the value of that painting? Nothing. At the same time I bought the picture, a friend of mine, let us say, invested the same amount in a small Western town. The town has become a city. His lot is worth to-day as much as my picture. What has he done? Nothing, you say. And you want to take the reward

of his investment and let mine go free ! Upon what principle of equity can this be justified ? Mr. George says I am entitled to the increment on account of my taste and sagacity in buying the picture. But how could I foresee its rise to fame ? And if I did, is it not true that human sagacity often foresees the course of events, discerns where population is likely to center, and invests accordingly ? And if this is the case, is not that same sagacity entitled to its reward ?

(3) *Assumptions in the unearned increment argument.*

It is assumed by the Single Tax advocates that those who deal in land are the worst sort of monopolists and accumulate the largest fortunes. But in a country where there are fifteen millions of land-owners, it seems idle to talk of monopoly. In a city where a large proportion of the inhabitants own their homes, it is folly. It seems almost superfluous, too, to call attention to the fact that the majority of great fortunes made in this country have not been accumulated by speculating in land. They have been derived from mines and railroads and banks and manufactures, and other forms of business. Where one fortune has been made in land, many more have been made in some other way !

It is assumed that landlords and land-owners do nothing for the community. They pocket all the benefits and make no return. If they rent their land, they appropriate the rent for themselves. If they allow it to lie idle, it simply increases in value, and they will take all the increase. But is it true that they are the bloated and selfish mortals Mr. George pursues with such vehemence of rhetoric, such verbal swords of Nemesis, through half a dozen volumes ? We must not forget that they *do* pay taxes, and *taxes upon this very land*. One almost feels when reading single tax literature, that this diabolical land-owner is the one person of all others in the community who pays absolutely nothing to the government, who is swinish enough to bilk the government out of all his debts for benefits received. But he pays such taxes as the common consent of the community deems fair and reasonable upon all his land whether improved or idle. He may not pay all that the single

tax men think he ought ; but this is a calamity which we must bear with Christian resignation for the present. In the millenium which Mr. George promises when his ideas are adopted, they will have to make up the deficit.

I suppose, too, that land-owners spend the revenues they derive from rent very much as other people spend their money ; that a large part of it goes to others in the community who have a living to make, and who make it by selling dry goods, groceries, clothing, furniture, and the like. And if anything is left, the land-owner either puts it into the bank where it will help some one in the community to carry on his business, or invests it in business himself. When he finally sells out and gets his unearned increment, it will most likely go into some enterprise in whose benefits the whole community will share. And in the meantime, while we are waiting for the single tax, we may get almost its equivalent from him in other forms of taxation. Let us not despair,—even of the land-owner !

(4) One thing more in this connection. We have always been taught that “it’s a poor rule that won’t work both ways.” The single tax men are all agreed that if a man puts money into land, and the value of that land rises, the increased value belongs of right to the community, and ought to be taken in taxation. Very good. Now suppose he puts money into land, and the value falls, as it often does. I doubt very much whether a man in this city to-day could get for lots what he paid for them two years ago. If he can hold them, he will come out all right. If the business interests of the state and city survive the present legislature, we may all continue to exist. But suppose a man cannot hold on. Suppose he is obliged to sell, and that at a great sacrifice ; will the Single Tax men say that the community ought to make good his loss ? If not, why not ? Periods of depression may come even under the Single Tax regime. If the community may take the increase, why should it not indemnify in case of decrease ? If it does not, the land-owner will be in a condition that neither men nor gods would envy. When the colored clergyman told his hearers that there were just two roads through this world, the one

a broad and a narrow way that led to destruction, and the other a narrow and a broad way that led to perdition, one of his hearers exclaimed, "If dat am de case, this cullord individual takes to the woods!" Between the "unearned increment" and the "unrequited decrement," the land-owner will have to "take to the woods."

IV.—I have now examined, as thoroughly as my time would permit the argument of the Single Tax advocates against private ownership in land. If I may trespass a little farther, I want to say a few words directly in favor of

PRIVATE OWNERSHIP.

1. It is a principle that reformers too often lose sight of, that "Society can only be helped forward in the immediate line of its own historic growth."

"In the earliest stages of civilization," says Mr. George, "we see that land is everywhere regarded as common property."

Certainly. But in the progress of civilization that common-ownership has been outgrown and left behind as a system of no further use to the race.

It is because the world has advanced, that we do not want to retrace our steps. "No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Mr. George expresses fears that our present industrial system may be overthrown in a revolution. But does he know of a revolution that has gone backward? One system, indeed, after another has been deposed; but has there ever been a case in which the system of individual ownership in land was ever destroyed that the nation might go back to the days of common ownership?

Even revolutions go forward!

One of the best examples of state ownership that remains in the world to-day is that of India. The Duke of Argyll in his review of Mr. George's book says: "India is a country in which, theoretically at least, the state is the only and universal land-owner, and over a large part of it the state does actually

take to itself a share of the gross produce which fully represents ordinary rent. Yet this is the very country in which the poverty of the masses is so abject that millions only live from hand to mouth, and when there is any—even a partial failure of the crops, thousands and hundreds of thousands are in danger of actual starvation. The Indian government is not corrupt, whatever other failings it may have, and the rents of a vast territory can be far more safe if left to its disposal than they could be left at the disposal of such popular governments as Mr. George has denounced on the American Continent. Yet somehow the functions and duties which in more civilized countries are discharged by the institution of private ownership in land are not as adequately discharged by the Indian Administration. Moreover I could not fail to observe, when I was connected with the government of India, that the portion of that country which has most grown in wealth is precisely that part of it in which the government has parted with its power of absorbing rent by having agreed to a permanent settlement.”—*Property in Land*, pp 37, 38.

2. This line of historic growth has not been determined arbitrarily. There are reasons in human nature and in the nature of civil society.

Governments have encouraged private ownership. Mr. George constantly speaks of the land as having been stolen. Dr. Abbot in a late number of the *Forum* joined in this wretchedly false and mischievous accusation.

“With wonderfully few exceptions,” says General Walker, “those who own the land among us, have come into possession of it, not only peacefully and lawfully, but with the invitation and encouragement of the government, upon the well-settled and unanimously approved policy of the people. Challenge this statement who can! Take the whole region west of the Alleghanies! It was once substantially all of it, the property of the government. In this state of things the people, all parties and all sections concurring, adopted the principle that this vast domain should, as early as possible, become individual property. Finding that the original terms of sale did not allow a

sufficiently rapid alienation of the soil, they reduced those terms. Finally, by general consent the policy was adopted of giving away land, in moderate amounts, to actual settlers ; in order that each farm might have an owner, and that the United States might have a numerous body of citizens bound to the soil by ties of affection and interest.”

The reasons for encouraging private ownership do not lie far away, but I must rehearse them very briefly :

(1) It secures the best use of the soil.

Mr. George, indeed, denies this, and says that it is not ownership, but undisturbed possession, and that possession he would give to a man and his descendants, just so long as the rent was paid to the state. But if a government may violate a title, there is no reason to believe that it would respect a lease.

(2) It makes better citizens.

For one to feel that he owns the ground under his feet, as well as the roof over his head, gives him a sense of dignity.

His value as a citizen and voter is increased. The man who owns his own home—in the commonly accepted sense of that word—must take a deeper interest in the administration of public affairs, than the man who does not own his home, and has no property of this description at stake.

The man who thus has something to gain or lose will always be upon the side of public order.

It is said that when the labor riots of 1877 endangered life and property in many of the smaller industrial centers of Pennsylvania, there was no appreciable disorder in the city of Philadelphia ; and this was attributed at the time to the fact that so large a proportion of the people of that city owned their homes—their houses and the lots upon which they stand.

(3) It is the open door by which multitudes pass from the ranks of poverty into the realm of comfort.

“The method by which millions of persons,” says Prof. J. B. Clarke, “have found their way into the favored circle, has been by taking possession of land that is either freely given to them by the state, or sold by private owners on terms that place the payments wholly in the future. So far from excluding

laborers from the property-holding class, our land system has been the open door by which they have entered it. Though the reduction of public domain may narrow the entrance, it is broad enough still to admit a multitude."

I believe that private ownership of land, as well as of other property, is the very foundation of this nation's prosperity and glory. I do not mean to say that there are no evils connected with it—great evils, perhaps; but what good thing is there in this world without its attendant evils? What field without its weeds? What summer without its tempests?

It is not safe or wise to meddle with the institution of private property in land. The promise of something better is a delusion. Goldsmith tells us of a miller who dreamed three nights in succession that a huge pan of gold and diamonds was concealed under a large stone beneath his mill. He at length dugged down until he came to the stone seen in his dreams. It was too large to lift alone, so he ran for his wife to assist him. But when he returned, instead of his fancied treasure, there was his mill, his only support, undermined and fallen. Dreaming of something better than that upon which our civilization rests, many are to-day assailing the foundation. THE SINGLE TAX IS THE PICK AND SPADE!

ADDITIONAL NOTES.

I wish to say that the discussion which followed the address was conducted in the most friendly and pleasant manner. It was lively and spirited, but no ill-feelings were expressed. I trust that the practice of meeting face to face to discuss their differences will more and more prevail among men.

It was strenuously contended in the general debate that I did not understand Mr. George's position on private property in land; that he did not want to make any change in the present system of ownership. I have quoted liberally from his works in order to make this very point clear. I feel reasonably certain that I understand Mr. George. His language seems very

far removed from ambiguity. I add one or two quotations to those I gave in the address.

“The anti-slavery movement in the United States commenced with talk of compensating owners, but when four millions of slaves were emancipated, the owners got no compensation, nor did they clamor for any. And by the time the people of any such country as England or the United States are sufficiently aroused to the injustice and disadvantages of individual ownership of land to induce them to attempt its *nationalization* they will be sufficiently aroused to *nationalize* it in a much more direct and easy way than by purchase. They will not trouble themselves about compensating the proprietors of land.”—*Progress and Poverty*, p. 326.

“But a question of method remains. How shall we do it? We should satisfy the law of justice, we should meet all economic requirements, by at one stroke abolishing all private titles, *declaring all land public property, and letting it out to the highest bidders in lots to suit*, under such conditions as would sacredly guard the private right to improvements.”—*Progress and Poverty*, p. 361.

“If we apply to this case of The People vs. The Land-owners the same maxims of justice that have been formulated by land-owners into law, and are applied every day in English and American courts to disputes between man and man, we shall not only not think of giving the land-holders any compensation for the land, but shall take all the improvements and whatever else they may have as well.

But I do not propose, and I do not suppose that any one else will propose to go so far. *It is sufficient if the people resume the ownership of the land.* Let the land-owners retain their improvements and personal property in secure possession.”—*Progress and Poverty*, p. 329.

“As the tax upon land values irrespective of improvements was increased, more and more of the rent which now goes to favored individuals would be taken for public benefit, until ultimately, if we could attain to ideal perfection, the selling values of even the most valuable land would entirely disappear, and taxation would become rental paid the State.

In this simple way, without increasing governmental machinery, but, on the contrary, greatly simplifying it, *we could make land common property.*”—*Social Problems*, p. 223.

It is needless to add to this long list of quotations. It will not do to compare them to isolated Scripture texts. They contain the very gist of Mr. George's philosophy. So long as these passages stand in his books and bear the relation they do to his scheme, it is idle for any one to deny (1) that Mr. George wishes to abolish private ownership in land, and (2) that he proposes the Single Tax as the means of reaching that end.

If words in these passages mean what the same words do when found elsewhere, then I contend that I understand Mr. George. If the Single Tax men have not found these passages, and many others like them, I commend the works of Mr. Henry George to their serious attention.

One other point: Rev. S. W. Sample thought I had made an absurd mistake in charging that Mr. George's theory looked in the direction both of anarchy and socialism—two things that he asserted were as wide apart as possible, anarchy meaning without government, socialism everything government.

Any one who reads the address will easily see that I meant that Mr. George's assertion, "when a title rests but on force, no complaint can be made when force annuls it," would go far to justify such particular manifestations of anarchy as occurred in Chicago.

But, as I showed, in my final speech before the league, some of the principles of anarchy and socialism are, after all, not so far apart, as Mr. Sample supposes. I quoted Prince Krapotkin, and I here subjoin the quotation in full.

"In common with all Socialists, the Anarchists hold that *the private ownership of land*, capital, and machinery has had its time; that it is condemned to disappear; and that all requisites for production must, and will, become the common property of society, and be managed in common by the producers of wealth."

The above is from his article on the *Scientific Basis of Anarchy* published a few years ago in the *Nineteenth Century*. Prince Krapotkin being a believer in the principles of anarchy and a recognized authority on the subject, may be supposed to understand the relations of his system.

I add the testimony of Prof. Andrews, who fills the chair of Political Economy in Cornell university :

“The strictly economic tenets of the two parties [i. e. anarchists and socialists] are identical. Both restrict the legitimate range of private property to that wealth which, like food, clothing, houses, books, and similar personal belongings, has no other destination but to be consumed, making it the business of society in general to administer both the great instrumentalities of production, land and capital.”

When one is compelled to choose between such authorities and the baseless assertions of Mr. Sample, his position is—to say the least—extremely cruel.

It is due to all such thoughtful Anarchists as Prince Krapotkin, to say that they discountenance all violence.

The difference between anarchists and socialists is thus stated by Prof. Andrews, and explains in a word what the anarchists mean by “no government :”

“Socialists exalt the State’s economic function, yet insist on both the utility and the necessity of its purely political attributions. Anarchists would make its office economic only. In other words they would, strictly, have no State at all, but only a lot of administrative machinery somewhat resembling the State. Not exactly, to be sure, for anarchism also rejects the idea of nationality, and proposes the commune as the largest admissible social integer. There is no longer to be a France, a Germany, an England. Instead, each land is to be dotted over with village, town, and city co-operative groups, mutually helpful but mutually independent, owning no common superior, and ignoring all national lines.”

MARION D. SHUTTER.

Minneapolis, March 31, 1891.